

# The Standard Sequence and the Non-Traditional Methodologies

*Robert C. Lafayette, Indiana University*  
*Lorraine A. Strasheim, Indiana University*

**ABSTRACT** Several non-traditional methodologies have existed on the fringes of the profession for almost two decades. Of late, however, these approaches are receiving a great deal of attention, motivated, in large part, by the impetus toward proficiency testing and the research findings in second language acquisition.

While the professional literature is featuring more and more descriptive articles on the non-traditional methodologies, either individually or collectively, what is needed is an assessment of how these methodologies address four major concerns

in the profession today: 1) the provision of as stress-free a learning environment as possible; 2) the emerging role of silence in foreign language learning and teaching; 3) the role of grammar; and 4) the development of students' speaking skills. In the process of analyzing some of the salient features of the non-traditional methodologies and postulating how teachers can utilize their handling of the four concerns identified, what emerges is some perspective as to what the impact of the non-traditional methodologies upon the standard sequence can and should be.

## Introduction

If one were to observe a random sampling of this country's foreign language classrooms and/or examine the basal textbooks widely used in schools and colleges across the nation, two conclusions would be inevitable. The first is that few teachers and fewer textbooks have a clear-cut methodological approach. Both teachers and textbooks promote what the profession has deemed "eclecticism," that is, the use of whatever techniques appear to be the most "teachable" in light of teacher skills and personalities and of whatever activities seem to be the most "learnable" from the

standpoint of student needs, interests, and abilities in the context of the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. One publisher advertises instruction in this mode as "the balanced skills approach." The second conclusion, related to the first, is that in so far as syllabi are concerned, most teachers and almost all textbooks assume that a conscious understanding of grammar is a prerequisite to acquiring the four language skills, an assumption that Krashen and Terrell assert may be helpful but never necessary.<sup>1</sup>

Given the elective status of foreign languages in the curricula of the vast majority of schools and colleges and the fact that American schools and colleges enjoy the unique power of local control over what is taught (content) and how teaching is done (methodology), this penchant for eclecticism is not difficult to explain. Classroom teachers, pressed by the need to attract and hold as many students as possible, feel they must be flexible enough to ad-

*Robert C. Lafayette* (Ph.D., Ohio State University) is Professor of Language Education at Indiana University; Bloomington, IN. *Lorraine A. Strasheim* (M.A.T., Indiana University) is Coordinator for School Foreign Languages in the Indiana University Office of School Programs; Bloomington, IN.